



# The Bonfire Boys

Fifth of November

Every November 5th  
in Lewes, Sussex, a spectacular  
"Bonfire Night" takes place,  
with torches, fireworks, music and  
elaborate costumes.  
Thousands of people attend.

The tradition began as a  
commemoration of the 1605  
Guy Fawkes gunpowder plot, and hit  
a crisis point in 1847 when eight  
Bonfire Boys were sent to prison for  
causing a riot.

My ancestor John Stanbridge  
and his brother Thomas  
were among them.



Thursday, November 4, 1847

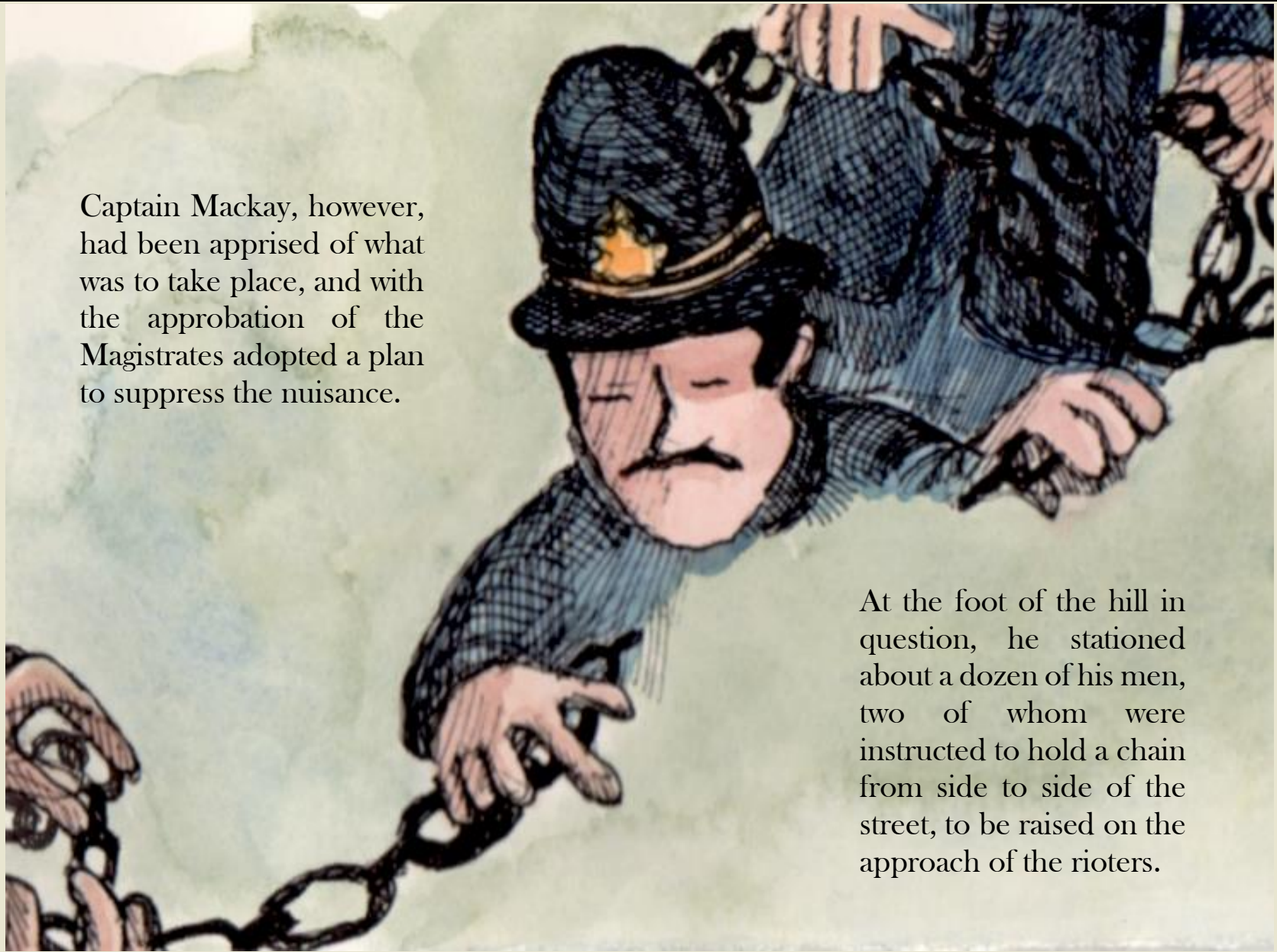
The whole of the East Sussex  
Constabulary were ordered to Lewes,  
200 special constables were sworn in,  
80 London Police were sent down,  
and two troops of Lancers at Brighton  
were kept under arms in readiness at  
a moment's notice, if required.



No sooner, however, had the clock struck twelve on Thursday night, and Guy Fawkes Day thus commenced, than a lighted tar barrel, held by a chain passed through it, was set rolling down the steep part of St. Ann's Hill toward High Street, preceded by a man armed with a pick axe and disguised by a mask, and followed by about 80 others armed with bats and bludgeons, shouting and making an awful uproar.



Captain Mackay, however, had been apprised of what was to take place, and with the approbation of the Magistrates adopted a plan to suppress the nuisance.



At the foot of the hill in question, he stationed about a dozen of his men, two of whom were instructed to hold a chain from side to side of the street, to be raised on the approach of the rioters.



On their arrival at the spot in question, the chain was raised knee high, and over it fell several of the leaders.





Eight were pounced upon by the police and conveyed to the station house, while their companions took flight.

## SOURCES

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*Brighton Gazette*, November 4 and 11, 1847, and excerpts transcribed from the *Sussex Express* of November 13, 1847. With sincere appreciation to Jim Etherington, of the Lewes Historical Society, August 2011.

“Spring Assizes, Home Circuit, Lewes, March 23,” *The Times* (London), 24 March 1848, page 7, cols 4-5.

“Lewes Bonfire Night Celebrations,” [online] Lewes website (<http://www.lewes.co.uk/bonfire.aspx> : accessed July 15, 2011).

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Police Depositions, “Trial of Eight Men for Riot and Tumult in Lewes, 5 November, 1847,” National Archives U.K., ASSI 36/6, 18 pages, received 9 August 9 2011 via email.

Excerpt from *Sussex Agricultural Express*, 23 October 1847, transcribed by Jim Etherington of the Lewes Historical Society and kindly provided via email, August 2011.

